

A crime of multitudes

The okupation in face of the power

In Christopher Nolan film, “*The Dark Knight Rises*”¹, when Bane² calls for a social revolution in Gotham City, he is already known as a terrorist leader around the world due to media coverage he had at the beginning of his struggle. Bane is a leader among popular masses thanks to his charisma and facility to reach people: he commands, organizes, and mobilizes them with the aim of reaching a real social justice. In a politic-ideological offensive and bringing out one of the public administration greatest lies³, Bane condemns the rich and powerful people and in a “public” act, he gives back to citizens the society power, demands an *okupation* of the city and at the same time, Bane becomes the last *Wall Street okupa*. Once again, Bane calls the congregation of the 99%⁴ and pushing it as a multitude, he creates a weapon to overthrow the system that has oppressed and enclosed the people in an unfair circle. However, what Hollywood slides in this film, among other things, is that the only idea of popular power could produce a socio-economic chaos: massive trials without the opportunity of defense (non justice), execution of rich people and politics, disorder on the streets, and the highest level of criminality; the popular order would be nothing but popular terror. This desire of social justice in which is involved “*The Dark Knight Rises*” shows how the terror created by the power on people’s hand is a mistake.⁵

Let's read this situation between lines, elites fear is that *Occupy Wall Street* (hereinafter OWS) and the related movements to the basic ideals of social justice could establish real parameters of power and democracy for all. For this reason, Hollywood, the big mass media, and the most influential political leaders issue a similar speech: these movements are violent, only from violence they might have access to the power, and that is the reason why it is necessary to eliminate them.

But what Hollywood does not *project* is that these contemporary social movements, mainly, are against the use of violence, they act according to common interests, always in consensus, and conferring action points through general assemblies. However, inside the general *observers* sense, there are marked prejudices: a public space *okupation* is a violent act; observers apply this qualifier no matter if activists do not use any weapon that could damage physically a person or a space, no matter if it is a pacific *okupation*. Moreover, despite these consigns, activists keep being evicted and separated, especially by the police that is commanded by authorities; they look for the disintegration of these groups. Therefore,

¹ (Bale, Caine and Oldman)

² Bane: Fiction character from DC Comics, his creator is Chuck Dixon. Bane is considered one of the most powerful and intelligent enemies Batman has to face to.

³ In the 8th anniversary of the death of Harvey Dent, a former federal prosecutor of Gotham City whose death was the base to create the ‘Dent Act’ (a law with extraordinary faculties and no tolerance to imprison criminals with the highest penalty. This penalty virtually wiped out the crime in Gotham City for eight years after Joker’s terror), the commissioner Gordon planned to admit in a speech that Harvey Dent was the responsible criminal of several deaths and to attempt on the life of his son. However, the commissioner thought the city was not prepared yet to know the truth. Bane got a copy of Gordon’s speech and used it in the struggle against the administration; he exposed Dent Act as a law based on lies and under a criminal figure.

⁴ 99% is a political slogan used by *Occupy Wall Street* movement (OWS), which refers to the concentration of income and wealth among the top earning 1% and reflects an opinion that the 99% are paying the price of the mistakes of a tiny minority within the upper class. Wikipedia:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/We_are_the_99%25

⁵ (Batman)

one of the most effective strategies that power elites have used is the intimidation: accusing them of false profiles, attempting their public and private life, and assaulting their intimacy. There is Alexa O'Brien case, an activist and independent journalist who was inscribed in an Australian security magazine, related to Al Qaeda, and even received security messages from the FBI to her personal cellphone.⁶

Let's take Bradley Manning's case,⁷ *an example of authority* from the State. Manning was imprisoned and the judicial process inside USA Army continued under secrecy, he was judged as 'enemy of the State' and isolated completely from his family and even from his lawyer. What authorities wanted to show globally was that an act of civil disobedience like this would be punished, including the destruction of his whole life and family, and consequently trying to strengthen the State's absolute authority and untouchable power. Manning's case is just another intimidation example.

- Violence vs. aggression -

Let us briefly sum up OWS September 11 event. During the first ten days of the occupation in Zuccotti Park⁸, the action was, somehow, pacific and calmly, there were neither major disturbances nor significant problems inside or outside Zuccotti; activists were protesting tranquilly at Wall Street area and two daily assemblies were done to share information among its members. But from second week, things changed radically because violence became the protagonist. City police clashes were very aggressive, violating frequently the human rights, in fact, there are hundreds of videos and photographs in Internet that validate these aggressions. A video shows how an officer punched a protester three times in his head and shoulder. Then, the protester was in a soft lock in which he linked arms with other protesters and sat in the street while the police attempted to pull him away. This video shows that the officer tried to separate the activist several times by pulling him; his only method was to punch and pull violently.⁹

There are countless evidences that display the aggression in OWS came first from the police but we do not have to forget that all this is possible due to the availability of different recorded media that society in general has right now. When the information of what was going on Zuccotti Park spread on the Internet, only then mass media transmitted these events.

One month later on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, *Occupy London* started and occupation outside the London Stock Exchange. At the moment of the action, there were about 20 police vans filming, recording and photographing each of the activists and every movement and word they said.¹⁰

⁶ (O'Brien)

⁷ Bradley Manning was a soldier and analyst from the United States army intelligence department. Manning filtrated thousands of classified documents to WikiLeaks about Afghanistan and Iraq wars, as well as diplomatic leaks from different US Embassies. The army video known as *Collateral Murder* was one of the most controversial ones because it showed some action methods that this army uses in the field. Now, Manning faces 35 years condemn in prison due to his filtrations. Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chelsea_Manning

⁸ Zuccotti Park is located in Wall Street, lower Manhattan, New York City. This park belongs to Brookfield Offices Properties, one of the biggest real state companies around the world.

⁹ (Friedersdorf)

¹⁰ (Tremlett)

In view of the fact that any mass media was in this place, the police, as in New York, started acting aggressively against the activists with the only intention to dissolve the movement quickly before it could have gained force and propagated again as it happened with OWS. This occupation in London was carried out but because of the police *agility*, this could not have had the activists' desire effect.

Situated in this context, we could evidence that violence is a very effective means of diminishing a movement or a person,¹¹ but why this fear to use violence? Slavoj Žižek asks: *how one can completely repudiate violence when the fight and aggression are part of life?*¹²

OWS movement tries to mediate any type of conflict through dialog or democratic resolutions, within communication: with the use of the language. Reflections of how language works, *problematizes the blurred idea of language and the symbolic order as a way of reconciliation and mediation, or the pacific coexistence like the opposite to a violent way of a raw and an immediate confrontation.*¹³

Debate is what language looks for, to exchange ideas and opinions, even if this exchange could be aggressive but there persists an immediate recognition of the other side, of the receptor. The entrance into the language and the resignation of violence are often understood as two aspects of the same gesture: *"Speaking is the foundation and the structure of socialization and is characterized by the resignation of violence".*¹⁴

It is essential to define violence in such a way that it could not be classified as 'good'. The moment when we affirm that we are able to distinguish the 'good' from the 'bad' violence, we lose the appropriate use of the word and fall down in the confusion. And especially, as soon as we affirm to be developing criteria to define a supposedly 'good' violence, each one of us will find easily to use them in order to justify our own violent acts.¹⁵

What Žižek tries to collect as a condition, is *"the possibility to differ between 'aggression' that belongs to vital force, and 'violence' that is a mortal force: 'violence' is not the aggression as such, but is its excess that disturbs the normal course of the things wishing always more and more. The task turns in getting away itself from this excess"*.

Incorporating this condition to OWS, we see that the movement initially acted violently but never aggressive, so it remained for two months. It also happened at the beginning of the *okupation* in Sidi Bouzid, London, Tahrir, Madrid, and even in Kiev, where we have seen recently that without mention it, the actors' action became eventually into an *okupation*. These revolutions should be violent, agitators, they frenetically move the 'normal' state of everydayness, disturb, make feel nervous to observers, concern to society because they are disrupting the fragile stability of a consolidate system,

¹¹ We do not have to forget that Hollywood films, one of the biggest and most rentable enterprises around the world, are full of violence.

¹² (Žižek)

¹³ (Habermas)

¹⁴ (Muller)

¹⁵ (Žižek)

but these movements do not act in an aggressive way unless they receive an attack from the authority, only then, and sometimes, they choose to defend themselves.

- *New methods of communication* -

What happened in OWS was a worldwide example of perseverance, it could resist despite the aggression they received, so, ¿what happened with *London occupation*? ¿Was not this strong enough? One of the differences between these two occupations was that New York activists and citizens recorded everything that was happening inside, both in assemblies and in police actions, being this information the one that *traveled* over network; many times activists provided live video streaming so anybody could have access to the movement in real time. Thereby, alternative media due to its immediacy and ease of using displaced the importance that traditional mass media has had to inform population; these big enterprises did not have any other option that recorded these events. Social media turned out to be the most powerful tool to reproduce the event exteriorly; in addition, it was the inner instrument to help taking more democratic decisions because this media facilitated the general agreement, there were different points of view, other *realities* on where activists could act above the biased information from traditional media. OWS documented all the time; it was a great inhibiting force and a galvanizing element so individual actions became one only unit, they cooperated according to their skills, capacities, or competences creating something really solidary, a real individuation community.

During the *okupation*, in this community emerged a new phenomenon, different activists started to move: Tahrir activist went to New York to accomplish this particular action, the occupation of Zuccotti Park and collaborate with assemblies, sharing experiences from different occupations, finding similitudes and differences that could only coerce the revolutionary movements. Likewise in these social platforms, they started dispersing techniques, tactics, and strategies that other movements already had achieved, their experiences and methods of action, which were shaped and consolidated largely, the event that the movements have carried out as multitudes.

The accumulation of events was the provoker of the birth and the consolidation of social movements force. In fact, without the 2008 economic crisis, it would have been impossible that these social movements were born; it was from the complaint and the sensation of being offended what joined them, and having the social networks and virtual platforms as tools, it was formed a big difference from former social movements. These actions conform a philosophy and a domain of techniques that must be carried out efficiently, the adoption of effective process is the key to strengthen the action; at the end, in many cases techniques are the difference between success or failure of a struggle in the action field.

- *Between the desk and the plaza* -

There is an interesting tension in the conformation of the network, what happens when there is a fixation in the collective conscience. Actually, it is a consensus but in a much less structured form, which promotes a tension among people that have come to occupy (implying to be outside the comfort zone) and those who stayed at home. Subsequently, the movement has to operate a work based on

common structured decisions, a base work; it is a tension that does not end to be solved, there is not a definition of action plan among these activists, office and action activists.

Then, an important gap is opened which makes us question our condition of action as activists of *Facebook* or *okupa*: ¿why it is so important to occupy a space if each one has his own agenda, if we have immediate access to social networks? ¿Why bothering to go out of our wellbeing to possibly confront a strong and armed authority? Many people think to encamp a place is to waste time.

This debate is generated when working in network. In this space, people try to coordinate more autonomous individuals to do tasks or operations in which they can feel more comfortable, generating a sensation process that these people belong to a community, people feeling the same thing or having the same concerns about something in common, and consequently conforming a state of individuation. At this point, the key of revolutions becomes visible, what is generated in network carries the action to the physical space. There is a natural human need to communicate face to face, it is something much deeper. It is also an experiment to see how much pressure it is possible to practice in the commitment of activists within the conception of the civic space. When the civic space is just a sidewalk between two different malls, there is a need to create public and not private spaces that are not even related to the work of a person, a space in which we could assemble and execute the public space as such.

¿Should the place be questioned?

It is a sample of the literal sovereignty over a certain area; social movements occupy physically the public space through a political decision, it is a double strategy power. In this case, it is a question of force not of legalities and any of both sides, activists as well authorities, could open it as a weapon; we saw it in "*The Dark Knight Rises*" when the police is contained in the underground city and the multitude owns the other city, the one they never lived in before. The base of these social movements is to appropriate the public space, they are the public, they are going to occupy it anyway and this simple act is challenging and tremendously creative, everything is derived from this act.

In the domination of this physical space, a mini *okupa* State is created, that is what happens when a piece of land is controlled. When there is a coercive force, it starts raising certain structures on the treatment and the management inside this space and over the people who occupy it; certain methodologies are chosen to treat with the police, with opportunists and infiltrators inside the movement. In these movements, there was not any power or leadership monopoly, if they had, these problems would have been easy to deal with a direct or indirect negotiation (a method used in the current system). When any disturbance like this could deeply damage the movement, in which there is not coercion power but persuasion, the capacity to show what most people think is the tool to act, and this is also education.

Nevertheless, what happens when a movement is horizontal is that any internal aggression is highly harmful to the whole movement. A person like this can damage anything if there is not a strategy of approaching these problems inside the movement. Horizontality has these risks, it is very fragile and easily gives the members a hard time, but for these movements, the leaders' absence is something really

important, they are loyal to the 99% ideal, furthermore, the most compromised 'positions' as spokespersons, moderating, or directors, are rotated. But if the movement believes that in some moment verticality is necessary, the people from the horizontality should control this; the decision must be clear and public. Horizontality is not bad in itself but limited; a hegemonic organization should be very prepared.

- The space of *commons* -

It is true that the sense of *commons* is often difficult to conclude, and even, could become contradictory. But behind this conception, there are always the social conflicts and the political interests. In fact, politics according to Jacques Rancière "*is the activity sphere of the common that could be only contentious*".¹⁶ At the end, everything could diminish to these questions: ¿what side someone belongs to or wants to belong to, which are his common interests, and what does he seek to protect?

To extrapolate these approaches, it is necessary to take into account that the square as an object is a consequently derivation, the base is the necessity that a multitude has to **occupy a place**, the event needs the physical meeting point, reunion, inhabiting the space to handle it or to carry out the action, and through the impulse, an action that performances as shock waves manifesting in a different place within the same temporality, is the conformation of **resonance**. Then, a momentary transformation arises; it would be taken as a transmutation of the space through the individual movement that conforms a landscape, understood as a multiple body that materializes a place and that with its energy, it blurs the limits among the public and private, limits that have been consolidated by the established system during decades. The *okupation* challenges these delimitations.

¹⁶ (Rancière)

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